

Letters to the Editor

The Need to Study Theology: a Tool for Interreligious Dialogue

Why is the need to study theology so urgent? This need is not confined to Catholic clerics and Religious; or to Hindu theologians. This is an urgent need if we are to combat the rise of the posthuman, i.e., AI. If the cause of any discord between our religions lies in what St. Augustine calls a privation of the good (*privatio boni*); then the restoration of that good is only possible through the study of what is absolutely and always Good --- you call that foundational being God; we within Shakta Tantra, call this, 'Shakti'. Contrary to popular perception, Shakti is not an attribute of God. As Adi Shankaracharya pointed out; Shakti or power is God --- we who follow the Tantric marga within Hinduism are Brahmavadins and our religion in all its branches gestures towards monism and not monotheism. But In practice, like Catholics, we are theists; *vide* 'acintyabhedbheda'. The Truth is One; though the wise call it by many names.

Unless we study theology within our own traditions and then in the other's tradition; we will play into the hands of religious zealots. While we might neglect studying theology, various anarchic forces are training AI into spreading hate. Our shared mission as pilgrims of hope is threatened by our own reluctance to study the idea of the holy in both Hinduism and Roman Catholicism. While Hindus can enrich themselves from the insights of liberation theology; positive theology, process theology and formative spirituality; Roman Catholics can learn from Hinduism, techniques of effecting a mystical union with God in the here and now through ways of navigating dark nights of the soul. The Samkhya Yogi is not a solipsist. The Yogi has disunited the *dasein* from other ontic beings and has tapped into the '*mysterium tremendum et fascinans*'. The Yoga Sutras and the Mahanirvana Tantra both elucidate these spiritual techniques. It

is therefore not surprising to find that the writings of St. Bernard of Clairvaux and Hildegard of Bingen independently mirror the experiences we find recorded in the Madhuka of the Bhadrakya Upaniad. It is impossible for St. Bernard or Hildegard of Bingen to have accessed either the Yoga Sutras or any of the major or minor Upanishads.

It is only upon a systematic study of our shared holy texts that we will realise that the problem of religious relativism does not arise within our contexts as Indians. We are historical beings; each of us have been nurtured by heteroglossic religious voices and thus, we of all people in this world, are blessed to have escaped the yoke of 'one size fits all' spirituality. For example, Saint Elias Kuriakose Chavara not only knew Syriac but was also proficient in Sanskrit. Saint Chavara did more for Hindu children in Kerala than many Hindus ever did for their own children at Kerala. I have learnt more from the Carmelites of Mary Immaculate, whom Saint Chavara founded than I have learnt from many Hindus. This has not prevented me from discharging my duties every month at Tarapith at Birbhum as a fully initiated Tantric within Virachara. I trace my Shakta lineage to Kamakhya in Assam; my intellectual roots to the Society of Jesus and to the Carmelite of Mary Immaculate. In India we are going to be always Hindu-Christians; Christian-Hindus. This does not make us less religious than Hindus at Hawaii, or Catholics in Italy. It speaks volumes for us as Indians --- how we have learnt to hear the voice of God through all the useless noise that disturbs the rigid heart. Thus, in an earlier 'Letter to the Editor' in this paper, I had noted the similarities between the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises and Tantric 'nyasas'. This is my patrimony as an Indian Hindu who is a Hindu-Christian and the late Fr. Raimundo Panikkar was a Christian-Hindu.

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